WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A method for providing expert information from a pool of experts using a server system coupled to a centralized database and at least one client system, said method comprising the steps of:

displaying information on the client system identifying alternative paths for assistance to the user;

receiving a request from the client system based on an alternative path selected by the user;

accessing the database within the server system comprising a pool of experts, the database storing expert information relating to each expert in the pool of experts;

cross-referencing user information with expert information;

displaying expert information including expert availability information on the client system through an applet downloaded from the server system when a user calls upon an expert to seek assistance; and

contacting the expert based on user selected expert information inputted into the client system.

2.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein displaying information comprises displaying a plurality of communities on the client system including at least one of information technology, finance, manufacturing, engineering, risk management, quality, human resources, environmental, health and safety, legal, and operations.

3.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein receiving a request comprises:

displaying a plurality of communities on the client system including at least one of information technology, finance, manufacturing, engineering, risk

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management, quality, human resources, environmental, health and safety, legal, and operations;

receiving a selected community from the client system; and

receiving user information from the client system including at least one of location of user, sub-business of user, business of user, and communication language of user.

4.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein cross-referencing the expert information comprises:

comparing user information including at least one of location of user, sub-business of user, business of user, and communication language of user to expert information stored on the database including identification of expert, type of expert, location of expert, sub-business of expert, business of expert, schedule of expert, shift timings of expert, communication language of expert, and availability of expert;

retrieving available experts based on matching user information with expert information; and

sorting the retrieved available experts based on a selection criteria.

5.   A method according to Claim 4 wherein the selection criteria comprises sorting the retrieved available experts by the type of expert, then by matching the communication language of the user and each available expert, and then by matching the location, sub-business, and business of the user and each available expert.

6.   A method according to Claim 5 wherein the selection criteria further comprises sorting the retrieved available experts by the type of expert and by matching the location, sub-business, and business of the user and each available expert.

7.   A method according to Claim 6 wherein the selection criteria further comprises sorting the available experts by matching the location of the user and each available expert.

8.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying at least one of a photograph of each available expert, testimonials for each available expert, biographical data for each available expert, a length of service for each available expert, areas of expertise for each available expert, and previous customer interactions with each available expert.

9.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying expert selected hyperlinks and documents.

10.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying a calendar showing the days and times during which the expert is available to provide assistance to a user.

11.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying which experts within the expert pool are available and which experts are helping other users.

12.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information on the client system further comprises the step of displaying which experts within the expert pool are available and which experts are helping other users through an expert availability indicator displayed on the client system.

13.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information through an expert availability indicator further comprises the step of displaying availability information through an applet implemented in at least one of a well known programming language such as Java, C, and C++.

14.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying expert information through an expert availability indicator further comprises the step of tracking expert availability.

15.   A method according to Claim 14 wherein said step of tracking expert availability further comprises the steps of:

tracking the availability of each expert in the pool of experts;

tracking users who are interested in contacting a specific expert;

tracking an amount of time each user has been waiting to connect with the specific expert; and

displaying the expert availability on the client system.

16.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of contacting an expert based on user input into the client system further comprises the step of using user input into a user interface to select an available expert or join a queue of an expert currently helping another user.

17.   A method according to Claim 16 wherein said step of contacting an expert based on user input into the client system further comprises the step of using user input to select an available expert or join a queue of an expert currently helping another user after having previously selected the queue of a different expert.

18.   A system for providing expert information from a pool of experts, said system comprising:

a client system comprising a browser;

a database for storing expert information for a pool of experts;

a server system configured to be coupled to said client system and said database, said server system configured to:

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display information on the client system identifying alternative paths for assistance to the user;

receive a request from the client system based on an alternative path selected by the user;

access expert information from the database based on the alternative path selected by the user;

cross-reference user information with expert information;

display expert information including expert availability information on the client system through an applet downloaded from the server system when a user calls upon an expert to seek assistance; and

contact the expert based on user selected expert information inputted into the client system.

19. A system according to Claim 18 wherein said client system further comprises at least one of:

a displaying component for displaying information identifying various alternatives to the user;

a sending component to send an inquiry to the server system so that the server system can process and download the requested information to the client system;

a collection component for collecting information from users into the centralized database;

a tracking component for tracking expert information;

a displaying component for displaying expert information;

a receiving component for receiving expert information including at least one of identification of each expert, type of each expert, location of each expert, sub-business of each expert, business of each expert, schedule of each expert, shift timings of each expert, communication language of each expert, and availability of each expert; and

a contacting component for contacting a selected expert.

20. A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system further comprises:

a receiving component for receiving an inquiry to provide information from one of a plurality of users;

a processing component for searching and processing received inquiries against the database containing information collected by the collection component;

a retrieving component to retrieve expert information from the database; and

an information fulfillment component that downloads the requested information after retrieving from the database.

21. A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system further comprises a receiving component that receives an inquiry from the client system regarding at least one of a plurality of communities including at least one of information technology, finance, manufacturing, engineering, risk management, quality, human resources, environmental, health and safety, legal, and operations.

22. A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system further comprises a receiving component configured to:

display a plurality of communities on the client system including at least one of information technology, finance, manufacturing, engineering, risk

management, quality, human resources, environmental, health and safety, legal, and operations;

receive a selected community from the client system; and

receive user information from the client system including at least one of location of user, sub-business of user, business of user, and communication language of user.

23.   A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system further comprises a processing component configured to:

compare user information including at least one of location of user, sub-business of user, business of user, and communication language of user to expert information stored on the database including identification of expert, type of expert, location of expert, sub-business of expert, business of expert, schedule of expert, shift timings of expert, communication language of expert, and availability of expert;

retrieve available experts based on matching user information with expert information; and

sort the retrieved available experts based on a selection criteria.

24.   A system according to Claim 23 wherein said selection criteria comprises sorting the retrieved available experts by the type of expert, then by matching the communication language of the user and each available expert, and then by matching the location, sub-business, and business of the user and each available expert.

25.   A system according to Claim 24 wherein said selection criteria further comprises sorting the retrieved available experts by the type of expert and by matching the location, sub-business, and business of the user and each available expert.

26.   A system according to Claim 25 wherein said selection criteria further comprises sorting the retrieved available experts by matching the location of the user and each available expert.

27.   A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system further comprises an information fulfillment component configured to provide a user with a list of available experts and a list of experts that are helping other users on said client system.

28.   A system according to Claim 27 wherein server system further comprises an information fulfillment component configured to provide a user with an option of selecting an available expert or to join a queue of an expert currently helping another user.

29.   A system according to Claim 28 wherein said server system further comprises an information fulfillment component configured to provide a user with an option of selecting an available expert or join a queue of an expert currently helping another user after having previously selected the queue of a different expert.

30.   A system according to Claim 18 wherein said database stores expert information further comprising at least one of a photograph of each available expert, testimonials for each available expert, biographical data for each available expert, a length of service for each available expert, areas of expertise for each available expert, and previous customer interactions with each available expert.

31.   A system according to Claim 18 wherein said database stores expert information further comprising expert selected hyperlinks and documents for each expert in the pool of experts.

32.   A system according to Claim 18 wherein said database stores expert information further comprising a calendar showing the days and times during which each expert is available to provide assistance to a user.

33. A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system is further configured to allow a user to engage an expert by exchanging textual messages.

34. A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system is further configured to allow a user to engage an expert by telephone.

35. A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system is configured as a server system for a network of client devices.

36. A system according to Claim 35 wherein said server system and said client system are connected via a network.

37. A system according to Claim 36 wherein said network is at least one of a wide area network, a local area network, an intranet, and the Internet.

38. A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system is further configured to display which experts within the expert pool are available and which experts are helping other users through an expert availability indicator displayed on the client system.

39. A system according to Claim 38 wherein said server system is further configured to display availability information through an applet implemented in at least one of a well known programming languages such as Java, C, and C++.

40. A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system is further configured to track expert availability.

41. A system according to Claim 40 wherein said server system configured to display expert availability is further configured to:

track the availability of each expert in the pool of experts;

track users who are interested in contacting a specific expert;

track an amount of time each user has been waiting to connect with the specific expert; and

display the expert availability on the client system.

42.   A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system further configured to contact an expert based on user input into the client system.

43.   A system according to Claim 42 wherein said server system further configured to use user input from a user interface to select an available expert or join a queue of an expert currently helping another user.

44.   A system according to Claim 18 wherein said server system further configured to contact an expert based on user input from the client system to select a free expert or join a queue of an expert currently helping another user after having previously selected the queue of a different expert.